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SUBJECT: FOR FRANCE, TAC ACCESSION A POSITIVE SYMBOL FOR
ASEAN TIES, NOT A POLICY TOOL

REF: STATE 20228

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Kathleen H. Allegrone, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) France's January 2007 accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN has had positive symbolic value but little policy impact, Florent Aydalot, the MFA's Special Advisor on ASEAN affairs, told us March 9. Signing on to the treaty sent a clear signal that France has a special interest in Southeast Asia, Aydalot said, adding that accession helped amplify France's voice with ASEAN. But when bilateral differences arise with countries in the region, such as with Burma over human rights, the TAC has no application in discussions. Such issues are handled bilaterally. In this context, acceding to the treaty has caused no particular problems for France, Aydalot emphasized.

¶2. (C) One bitter side to France's agreement on the TAC was the irritation the move caused many of its European partners, Aydalot said. He related that then as now, the EU was trying to negotiate a modification to ASEAN rules to allow for regional groupings (in addition to individual states) to sign onto TACs. Some EU member states were upset at the time because they perceived that France moving on its own undermined European unity in the talks, Aydalot maintained (France is the only EU member state to have acceded to the treaty). One stumbling block is continued Chinese opposition to EU TAC accession, he said. Nonetheless, he predicted the EU and ASEAN will likely reach an accord in summer ¶2009. "Then France will be doubly covered," Aydalot quipped.

¶3. (C) There was little public or political debate domestically about French TAC accession, Aydalot recalled. He stressed that the government catalyst for the initiative in 2006 was Herve Ladsous, then the Assistant Secretary-equivalent for Asian Affairs and currently France's Ambassador in Beijing. Neither parliament nor any other government body produced reports or statements with respect to legal or political concerns related to the TAC, Aydalot said. Post has scanned and sent to EAP/RSP an official French declaration from January 13, 2007 that accompanied France's instrument of accession. PEKALA